

## SUCCESS WITH VILLA LA THEMBA

Villa La Themba is a home for children with special needs. Some of the conditions which children there are affected by include Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. The OT's from Thusanani made an initial home visit and began intervention in July 2010.

During our assessments of the babies and the environment (physical and social) of the home, we discovered several needs that had to be addressed. Children did follow a programme in the home. They were given love and good care by the staff, but they lacked opportunities to:

- 🦋 explore their environment
- 🦋 play with toys
- 🦋 interact with each other
- 🦋 develop independence and skills of daily living such as bathing and feeding themselves

We also found that the caregivers sought further knowledge on how to care for children with special needs and how they could improve the lives of the children.



Our intervention centered on developing a home programme for the children which included stimulation and learning time. Each child was given an individual programme which included therapeutic exercises to improve muscle tone and movement, correct positioning to prevent further physical deformity, and developmentally appropriate games aimed at enhancing cognitive development. These educational toys and games were obtained from donations received by Thusanani from generous members of the community.

Another aspect of our intervention was the training of care-givers. They were educated as to how to use the toys provided as well as how to make their own toys from waste. They were also given hands-on training regarding the exercise programmes and general child development and stimulation. After this weekly intervention which took place over 2 months, the home was then visited once a month. Questions and feedback were also handled telephonically.

The progress reported by the caregivers has been significant. Small steps taken every day have resulted in great improvement in the quality of life for the children at Villa La Themba:

- 🦋 The older children now sit at tables and feed themselves. They also assist with clean-up after meal-time
- 🦋 Now that children are allowed to play they are happier, and the care-givers report that they didn't realize before how "smart" the children are, and
- 🦋 Bathing and dressing activities have become easier and less time-consuming due to the regular exercises done with the children

## New staff at Thusanani

We are very excited to welcome two new staff members in January, Ghida Kok and Zandri Brune. We asked them to write something about themselves:

My name is Ghida Kok. I completed my Occupational Therapy degree at the University of Stellenbosch. Before I came to Thusanani, I was working at a forensic psychiatric hospital in Grahamstown. There I worked in the drug and alcohol rehabilitation unit, acute female and pre-discharge wards. It was quite an experience! It was difficult at times to be confronted with dysfunction when you know it could have been prevented if only there was an opportunity earlier in life for those people.

I have always had a passion to work with children and believe in working towards a bigger cause, which led me to apply for a job at Thusanani. I can't think of anything better than enhancing the potential of orphaned and vulnerable children!



This would be an opportunity to prevent dysfunction when it matters rather than trying to live with them later on in life...It was refreshing to start working at a place where the people around you share the same passion and go out of their way to deliver on the vision they have. Usually you find that the image of an organization is easy to maintain on websites and newsletters, but in actual fact practically the substance is missing. I was very happy to find a place like Thusanani where the substance is grounded in the vision! I have only been here 3 weeks and already I have seen lives change and potential to treat children and resources to make a difference. Another passion I have is for art: photography, fine arts, music, sculpture...you name it!

My name is Zandri Brune and I qualified as an Occupational Therapist at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2009. I completed my community service year at Dr Yusuf Dadoo Hospital. There I saw a variety of paediatric patients as well as adult patients suffering from stroke, paraplegia, hand injuries etc. I have a keen interest and passion for the paediatric field and intend to further develop myself in this area, particularly in sensory integration.

Working at Thusanani has already been an amazing experience. I love being part of an organization that makes such a difference in children's lives. Every day presents new challenges and successes and I look forward to what each day brings.



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**Account Number:** 1966 466226